

## Rationale

For my Written Task 1, I chose *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink as the literary text I would focus on. I wrote a series of diary entries by Michael Berg, from the beginning of the novel when he first meets Hanna Schmitz, to the end, after Hanna's death. The tone gradually gets darker, and Michael's voice less naive and gullible, as the entries go on. The purpose of this task is to explore Michael's shift in character and maturity throughout the novel by demonstrating his deepest inner thoughts and maintaining both the changes and consistencies in his personality.

I chose to write diary entries because I intend to show the examiner my understanding of the text by exhibiting my comprehension of Michael's character arc, his often conflicting feelings for Hanna, and his role as an unreliable narrator. I wrote in a first-person limited voice and reflected his change from a child to an adult. In Part 1, he is a naive child who falls blindly in love with a woman more than twice his age, with no understanding that what she is doing to him is a crime. In Part 2, he is seven years older, and as Hanna's secrets are revealed to him he is confused and feels betrayed, but also feels guilty himself. In Part 3, he is a middle-aged man who finally understands, to an extent, what Hanna has done to his life, yet still does not fully see that impact as negative.

Part 1

Dear Diary,

I am ashamed to say that a woman saw me throw up today. It wasn't only that I had never thrown up before and the sensation was less than pleasant, but she helped me—she assisted me in washing my hands and face, and together we cleaned the vomit away from the walk—and it was then that I noticed how pretty she was. Even now, I keep thinking about her.

It must be nothing. It must be that I just feel the need to thank her. My mother told me that I should do exactly that when I told her about the incident. If it were not for the hepatitis, which the doctor made known to me earlier, I would go tomorrow. But I do not want to throw up and embarrass myself again. The woman must already think I am a weak and sickly boy—I do not wish to reinforce that image.

I will go and thank her as soon as I can, and surely thoughts of her will cease to bother me.

Dear Diary,

I have not written in here for a stretch of time, but that is because I have been preoccupied. Not with my illness nor family matters, but...

I think I may have fallen in love.

So much has happened over the past few weeks, but I shall not write some of them down in here, in case someone discovers this diary. What I will write, however, is that her name is Hanna Schmitz and I am positive that she loves me back. She gives me more attention than my parents ever have in my entire life. She treats me like I matter. This must be it...the love I have read about in novels.

Although she sometimes loses her temper and I have to apologize to her, I think that I am happy. I do not mind the fights; it makes our relationship more intimate, as we can see more sides of each other. She gives me a sense of fulfillment that I have never felt before in my life and I am so glad of our encounter that day when I got sick.

Dear Diary,

I don't know what to do.

Hanna has left. The more I think about it, the more I believe that it is my fault. It is I who has been halfhearted in our relationship, I who was never good enough for her.

I'm sorry, Hanna.

## Part 2

Dear Diary,

I could not believe it at first, but I saw Hanna again.

Not only that, but in court.

Our professor made the trial the subject of our seminar. I had finally started to think of her less, to move on with my life. But I saw her in court when they called her name, and I think I froze for a moment.

It shouldn't matter, right? It's been seven years since I last saw her and she hasn't even tried to reach out to me since. I still cannot help but feel a little bitter about that.

But she is still the woman who helped me that fateful day seven years ago. She is still my first love.

Dear Diary,

I do not know how to feel anymore.

I don't think I will ever be able to understand why anyone would choose to be a criminal over an illiterate. Because yes—I have deduced that Hanna cannot read. It all adds up; all the times she asked me to read out loud for her, when she was furious over the note I had left her, and now, her taking the blame for writing the report when she had previously denied it.

I refuse to believe that she is evil. She cannot be, after everything that happened between us.

But deep down, I have to wonder if my refusal to believe anything bad about her stems from my own guilt.

Because if she is a criminal, then that means that I had loved a criminal.

Dear Diary,

Hanna is sentenced to life in prison.

After the trial was over, I tried to catch her eye.

But she wouldn't look at me. It was almost as if she had stopped caring—about anything.

### Part 3

Dear Diary,

It has been a long time since I last bothered to dust off this diary and open the pages, and yet I could not write in it without using the silly heading I used as a child. Perhaps I am scared for change. Though, of course, there has already been more than enough change for a lifetime.

I married Gertrud and we have a daughter. I don't get to see Julia often. It is not because of Gertrud that our marriage failed, as did every relationship with every woman afterwards. It is because of me. Because I could never get rid of the thoughts of Hanna pervading my mind.

Even now, when she is dead, I think of her often.

I have recently visited the daughter who survived the Holocaust camps. I told her about Hanna's and my relationship, and one thing she asked me has especially lasted in my mind—if Hanna ever acknowledged what she did to my life. I found that I could not answer.

Hanna cannot have been a wholly bad person. After all, she attempted to atone for her actions as an SSS guard by giving her money to the daughter. But still, the daughter's words have stayed in my mind. Did she ever think about what she did to me, a naive fifteen-year-old boy at the time?

I will never know, but it doesn't matter anymore.